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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001756

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS TBILISI

REF: A. TBILISI 1729

[1](#)B. TBILISI 1665

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. KENT LOGSDON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu paid an official visit to Tbilisi September 7-8 and was joined by his Deputy Under Secretary for the Caucasus and Central Asia, Ambassador Unal Cevikoz; Cevikoz later visited Sukhumi on September 10. Davutoglu met with President Saakashvili, Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze, Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Bokeria, Prime Minister Nika Gilauri, and Speaker of the Parliament David Bakradze. Davutoglu expressed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and Turkey's desire to act as a leader in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia; the Georgians resisted the latter overture. Davutoglu also raised the status of Turkish ship captain Mehmet Coskun Ozturk, who had been jailed on smuggling charges and for violation of Georgia's law on occupied territories and later released. The Georgian side raised the issue of repairing Georgian cultural monuments located in Turkey. Following his visit to Tbilisi, Ambassador Cevikoz traveled to Sukhumi where he met with Abkhaz de facto "foreign minister" Sergey Shamba. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment. Davutoglu's agenda of promoting Turkey as a leader in the region and in resolving the conflict did not resonate with the Georgians. The Georgians appear wary of Turkey increasing its influence in the region and do not want the Turks "negotiating" on their behalf with the de facto authorities. The Georgian Government would rather see only the United States and EU as leaders in defending its interests in the disputes with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, as reported ref a, the Georgians do believe that the visit resulted in a serious Turkish commitment to discuss the problem of Turkish commercial vessels visiting Sukhumi. End comment.

GEORGIA SAYS THANKS, BUT NOT THANKS, TO TURKEY'S OFFER TO ENGAGE IN ABKHAZIA

[1](#)3. (C) On September 7, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu arrived in Tbilisi where he was met by Georgian Foreign Minister Vashadze. This was the first visit of a Turkish FM to Georgia since 2003. Over the course of Davutoglu's two-day visit, he met with Saakashvili, DFM Bokeria, PM Nika Gilauri, and Speaker of Parliament Bakradze. According to Natia Sekhniashvili, desk officer for Turkey at the Georgian MFA, Davutoglu and Vashadze discussed bilateral and regional cooperation and agreed to institutionalize relations between the two countries' foreign ministries.

[1](#)4. (C) Davutoglu also reiterated Turkey's support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and stressed that the current conflict should be resolved through peaceful means. The Georgian side thanked Turkey for its support and for their funding of the construction of 100 homes for IDP families. Davutoglu emphasized the Turkish desire to

strengthen their role in Abkhazia through economic integration and cooperation with the de facto authorities. According to the Georgian MFA, the Turks are especially keen to establish businesses in Abkhazia. Davutoglu suggested that by doing this, the Turks would be able to strengthen their presence and political influence in Abkhazia and show the de factos that there is an alternative to Russia. The Georgian side told Davutoglu that they do not support this approach and do not see how Turkey could manage to promote such a process successfully. Sekhniashvili told poloff that Georgia does not consider Turkey a reliable partner in resolving the conflict, and it prefers to rely on the support of the United States and EU.

RELEASE OF SHIP CAPTAIN

15. (C) During his meeting with Saakashvili, Davutoglu discussed the status of Turkish ship captain Mehmet Coskun Ozturk. Ozturk and the cargo vessel he was operating were detained by Georgian authorities on August 16 for attempting to deliver fuel to Abkhazia. Ozturk was charged with smuggling and violating Georgia's law on occupied territories and was sentenced to 24 years in prison. Davutoglu spoke with Saakashvili about possible terms for Ozturk's release, and on September 8 the Supreme Court of Georgia announced that Ozturk would be released on a three-year conditional sentence and with a 30,000 GEL fine. Davutoglu and the Georgian side also agreed to work together to elaborate modalities for the passage of Turkish ships to Abkhazia.

RESTORING CULTURAL MONUMENTS

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16. (C) The two sides discussed the issue of cultural monuments. The Georgian side asked permission from the Turks to take measurements and assessments of Georgian monasteries in Turkey which need repair. The Turkish side said that this would be acceptable, on the condition that Georgia undertake repairs to the mosque in Batumi. Sekhniashvili told poloff that this would essentially involve building a new mosque, which the Georgian side is currently not willing to do. The two sides were unable to reach agreement on this issue.

TRIP TO SUKHUMI

17. (C) Davutoglu asked the Georgian side for permission for Ambassador Cevikoz to visit Sukhumi following the trip to Tbilisi. Georgia granted this permission, and Cevikoz traveled to Sukhumi on September 10. Davutoglu billed the visit as part of Turkey's continuing effort to help resolve the conflict through talks and negotiations with the de facto authorities. Shamba, on the other hand, portrayed Cevikoz's visit in Abkhaz press as a positive signal that Turkey would soon recognize Abkhazia as independent. According to a Turkish news article, a spokesman for the Turkish foreign ministry denied this claim, stating that Turkey has not changed its policy in the Caucasus.

LOGSDON